

Thimerosal Fact Sheet

What Is Thimerosal?

- It is a preservative used in 30 types of vaccines for 60 years.
- Used in multi-dose vials, it prevents bacterial and fungal contamination.
- It contains ethylmercury, a form of mercury that is probably less toxic and cleared faster from the body than methylmercury, the type of mercury found in some fish (swordfish, tuna).

Do Childhood Vaccines in Maine Contain Thimerosal?

- Recommended vaccines for young children in Maine do not contain thimerosal.¹

When Did Thimerosal Come to National Attention and What Did Maine Do?

- In 1999, when the presence of thimerosal in vaccines was highlighted in a report by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Maine Bureau of Health (now Health and Human Services' Public Health) moved quickly to assure that all childhood vaccines provided by them were thimerosal-free whenever possible.
- Since 2002, all recommended childhood vaccines have been thimerosal-free except for influenza vaccine. However, as of the 2005 flu season, influenza vaccine for children under 3 is also thimerosal-free.

Is Thimerosal Used In Any Vaccines?

- Some vaccines that are primarily for older children and adults are not available yet without thimerosal.
- Because those with small body weights and developing brains are most susceptible to mercury's effects, the first priority is to reduce mercury exposure in young children.
- Thimerosal-containing vaccines may be unavoidable in epidemics and in other situations where multi-dose vials are needed.

Is Thimerosal Associated with Autism?

- Six studies from Denmark, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States show no association between thimerosal in vaccines and autism.
- For example, after thimerosal was discontinued in the early 1990s in Denmark and Sweden, autism did not decline.
- However, it is clear there is a great need for broad research to determine the causes of and effective treatments for autism.

Where Can I Find Additional Information?

- www.mainepublichealth.gov and www.cdc.gov and www.fda.gov

**There are no known long-term risks of thimerosal when given in vaccine,
but there are very known risks of not vaccinating.**

*Dora Anne Mills, MD, MPH Director
Maine Health and Human Services' Public Health
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If you have further concerns or comments, please call Maine Immunization Program at
1-800-867-4775

¹ Occasionally, DtaP or Hepatitis B vaccines may have trace amounts of thimerosal left over from the manufacturing process.